

STATE OF THE RIVER 2001

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Potomac Timeline

- 1940. Congress ratifies pact creating the Interstate Commission for the Potomac River Basin. Basin population is 1.15 million.
- 1951. Thousands of fish killed by low dissolved oxygen. Washington Post calls the Potomac an "open sewer".
- 1956. Washington area population of 1.6 million is double the amount in 1932.
- 1965. President Johnson sets cleanup goal for clean water by 1975.
- 1969. Potomac Enforcement Conference meets.
- 1973. In the 70's, \$1.1 billion spent to upgrade area waste treatment plants. Algal mats on Potomac occur in August (rather than June as in the 1960s); the extent is reduced.
- 1978. First full time fishing guides begin to work the upper Potomac.
- 1984. Spread of hydrilla (SAV) prompts government control for marinas and channels.
- 1985. Fishing is so popular that a fisheries management program is established in DC.. Potomac has above average striped bass juvenile indices.
- 1987. Fish consumption advisory for PCBs in DC waters which is still in effect

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RIVER PROFILE

The Potomac River has long been viewed as the Nation's River because of its pivotal role in the development of the United States and as the seat of our national government. It is over 383 miles in length and flows through four states and the District of Columbia to its juncture with the Chesapeake Bay. The River and its tributaries have a drainage area of almost 15,000 square miles and has a population of nearly 5 million people.



View of the rushing Potomac waters at Great Falls National Park. An 800 acre park located along the Potomac River 14 miles upriver from Washington, DC. Known for its scenic beauty at the head of Potomac River fall line; the historic Patowmack Canal; and as a recreation destination for the residents of greater Washington.

The Potomac's Natural Landscape

The Potomac basin is one of the nation's most geologically and ecologically distinct river basins. From its headwaters to the bay, the river crosses five spectacular geological provinces representing over 600 million years of natural history.

Allegheny Plateau. This region is rugged countryside with steep slopes and rushing streams. North Branch of the Potomac from the Fairfax Stone (birth of Potomac) to the Savage River. Industries include coal, timber and related businesses with increasing tourism. Noted for spectacular scenery, fishing, hunting, whitewater boating and snow skiing.

Ridge and Valley. The landscape is a series of parallel ridges with small valleys in between the Great Shenandoah Valley. It is geographically expansive: 60 percent of the basin's area. Includes North Branch; South Branch; and the main stream of the Potomac (from the confluence of North/South Br. to Harpers Ferry, WV). Fertile limestone soils ideal for farming with thousands of caves in underlying limestone rock. Industries include crop and livestock farming, manufacturing, chemicals, and pulp and paper. Noted for colonial and Civil War historical sites, hunting, fishing, camping and hiking.

Blue Ridge. The geography is a narrow line of mountains, eight to 10 miles across and 95 of land is wooded. Potomac River proper from Harpers Ferry (WV) to Point of Rocks (MD). Industries are tourism and agriculture. Region is noted for the Blue Ridge Parkway, Shenandoah National Park, Appalachian Trail, beautiful scenery, camping and hiking.

Piedmont. Once covered with ancient forests but over 95 percent was cleared for farming; rolling, hilly terrain. Potomac River from Point of Rocks to Little Falls (MD). Industries include agriculture, vineyards, light and high tech industries. Noted for national capital area, colonial and Civil War sites, whitewater and equestrian recreation.

Coastal Plain (Tidewater). Land is relatively flat with extensive floodplains and wetlands; 50-60 percent forests in rural areas. Potomac River from Little Falls to the Chesapeake Bay. Industries are diverse with agriculture, fishing, tourism, military bases, technology firms, offices and retail. Noted for historical and archeological sites, national capital, fishing and boating.

Potomac Community Priorities

The Potomac Watershed Visions Project The District of Columbia, the state of Maryland, and the Commonwealths of Pennsylvania and Virginia recognize the need to maintain and improve the resources of the Potomac and the need for improved accessibility. The Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin in cooperation with US EPA and the Maryland Greenway Commission facilitated the Potomac Watershed Visions Project..

Began in 1992, a team of federal, state, and non-profit leaders convened a series of community focus meetings throughout the watershed. Spanning two years, the study identified key focus areas for revitalization of the river and the watershed starting with the local community and based on partnerships to effect changes on a regional level.

A six point "dream" for the Potomac River Watershed resulted:

1. More local visions be developed to promote conservation efforts;
2. Strengthened partnerships be developed among citizens, government, and business;
3. Citizens have greater access to decision making processes and information;
4. Citizens have greater public awareness of the Potomac as a special place;
5. Greater regional capacities are necessary to address broad river issues that transcend localities, and;
6. Community renewal be based on economic development strategies that recognize environmental and heritage assets.

The Potomac Human Landscape

Historically, the Potomac provided bountiful resources to a developing nation before going through a long period of degradation in the late 1800s. In 1966, the Potomac was termed "a national disgrace" because of terrible water quality from years of pollution. Over the last twenty years, the Potomac River has undergone a renewal that demonstrates the ability of citizens to reclaim and restore a watershed!

The Potomac River is the water supply for a large percentage of people living in the basin and also serves as the receiving body for treated wastewater. An average of 480 million gallons of water is withdrawn daily in the Washington area and approximately 100 million gallons per day of ground water is used in rural areas. The watershed is primarily rural, but is changing rapidly as the population moves out from metropolitan Washington, DC in search of business and living space.

Major industries include government, agriculture, mining, high tech, chemical manufacturing, pulp and paper, service, and water related economies and recreation. Agricultural lands provide a diverse variety of crops such as corn, soybean, apples, peaches and other staples. Dairies, chicken and turkey farms, beef and other commodities are also prevalent in the watershed. Forests dominate large portions of the watershed and lumber from these areas is important to the economy of the region. Crabs, oysters, shad, striped bass, sturgeon and other species have been harvested from the river historically.



The Shenandoah River as it meets the Potomac in Harpers Ferry WV. Harpers Ferry has played many themes in the American story: Native Americans, industry and transportation, African-Americans, John Brown, the Civil War, and the natural environment. Harpers Ferry became part of the National Park System in 1944. The park covers over 2,300 acres in the states of West Virginia, Maryland, and Virginia.

Potomac American Heritage Rivers Initiative

The supporting organization for the Potomac AHR Initiative is the Friends of the Potomac, a non-profit 501 (c) 3 organization. Friends of the Potomac is a basin-wide organization with membership many sectors organized by Councils: non-profit, state and local government, and business and agriculture. The membership and the elected board have strongly supported the American Heritage Rivers Initiative nomination and the subsequent activities. The activities of the AHR program are locally initiated, recognized by the board and supported by the local communities. The initiative supports cultural and historical activities, sustainable economic development, protection and restoration of water quality and natural resources, and community involvement in decision-making that aims to improve the river and the watershed.

A key partner in the Potomac Partnership has been the participating agencies of the Federal government. The National Park Service is the sponsoring agency for the River Navigator position, providing logistical support for the Initiative and to Friends of the Potomac. The US Fish and Wildlife Service provides the Navigator position and salary support. The General Services Administration has provided office space and related resources. The Environmental Protection Agency provided the River Navigator for the first year and has supported implementation of the Potomac Visions goals and objectives. The U.S. Forest Service, Army Corps of Engineers, Natural Resource Conservation Service and others have supported individual projects and activities within the Potomac Basin.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Designation of the Potomac as an American Heritage River would not have been possible without the support of a broad based coalition of individuals and groups, including a Steering Committee of 50 people who spent thousands of volunteer hours gaining support for the nomination. As a result of the AHR designation, communities throughout the basin have received assistance and guidance from the Potomac River Navigator and Friends of the Potomac, the lead community organization for the Potomac AHR Initiative. Over \$3 million has been raised for AHR priority projects and volunteer support has substantially increased.

Friends of the Potomac has launched several innovative and exciting programs that provide



Winners of the Nation's River Bass Tournament 2000; youth from urban environment are given the chance to experience professional bass fishing.

- *Community Partner Workshops.* A series of workshops throughout the basin to develop local projects that the community will undertake with the help of government, business and private partnerships. The Workshops are being funded by federal, regional and private grants. These workshops help the communities to determine their future direction in dealing with the problems that they are experiencing and the issues that are locally important. Some communities have focused on attracting tourism to local cultural and historical assets, while others have targeted environmental restoration or creating sustainable economic growth.
- *Leadership Potomac.* A new way of developing citizens as leaders and stewards. The leadership training program develops community leaders in the watershed in the areas of leadership, ecology and negotiation skills. The program is funded through grants and tuition. The training will enable community leaders from government, industry and private organizations to learn and develop their skills together in a classroom and in an outdoor setting. They will carry these skills back to their community.
- *Nation's River Bass Tournament.* The first tournament was held summer 2000 and the second tournament (June 1, 2001) will serve as the kick-off for National Boating and Fishing Week. The tournament has demonstrated that the Potomac's bass fishery has returned and that the sportsmen and women are key partners in the conservation and protection of the Potomac. The successful event raises funds for local projects and brings businesses, youth, and Congress out for an exciting day of bass fishing. The first year was broadcast over ESPN to reach a broader audience and spread word about the health of the river.



NPS Rivers and Trails leads workshop participants to develop concepts and actions for creation of the Coal Heritage Trail in western Maryland. An example of the services that the Community Partner Workshops is providing to communities.

- *Potomac River Day.* A yearly celebration held along the banks of the river that allows the Potomac Congressional delegation, Potomac Federal AHR team, and community winners of the "Friend of the Potomac" award to come together to celebrate the river and make public commitments for future work efforts.
- *Electronic newsletter for the watershed.* Distributed by Friends of the Potomac as part of the goal to serve as information clearinghouse and communications network for Potomac watershed communities. The newsletter includes informative news items, success stories, project information and event listings and serves to educate partner organizations of the issues and opportunities in the Potomac watershed.

Additional AHR Potomac Projects

- African American heritage in the Potomac has been highlighted by the publication of *The Potomac River: A Guide to African American Heritage* that was completed with the help of the National Park Service. The guide uses narrative and geographic information to celebrate the network of sites related to African American heritage along the Potomac River

- The Anacostia River Community Summit was held to create an opportunity for community dialog ad to begin the development of a community vision for lands along the Anacostia River. Over 200 community, District and Federal leaders attended this meeting.

- A watershed Land Trust Workshop was hosted by the Potomac Conservancy with support from AHR partners to strengthen land trust activities in the basin. Over 45 watershed leaders attended the workshop to enhance their ability to work on land conservation and restoration projects.

- Poultry Waste Digester. The River Navigator in 1999 provided support to communities in WV to evaluate feasibility of technology for disposing of poultry litter.



Potomac American Heritage River

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Future Challenges

The Potomac River Heritage Initiative has just begun to tap the potential of the program. In two plus years the progress has been substantial, but the program has the potential to expand exponentially to address the needs of the local communities along the river. The infrastructure has finally been established to grow the program into the future. The legacy of the program will be communities with better access to the Federal government programs, increased tourism and use of cultural resources, new water and land trails through important historic areas, protection and restoration of locally important ecological resources, more parks and public access areas, better relationships between business and the communities, and more ecologically sustainable business. The challenge before us now is to not abandon a program that, with nurturing, can provide these results in the next few years. The AHR initiative needs to expand to meet the needs of other river communities, because in the end, "a river runs through it".

Potomac Timeline *(Continued from page 1)*

- 1988. Anacostia Restoration Strategy Agreement signed.
- 1992. Sediment studies for Anacostia, Tidal Basin and Washington Ship channel find high levels metal and organics.
- 1994. Potomac Visions Report recognizes importance of local watershed level approaches.
- 1995. American shad restoration project begins near Great Falls with stocking of 1.2 million fry.
- 1996. Three Potomac river floods in one year severely damage the C&O Canal.
- 1998. Potomac is designated by President Clinton as an American Heritage River. NPS, National Capital Region joins as lead federal agency for the Potomac AHR.
- 1999. Friends of the Potomac and partners host Potomac River Day to recognize local success stories across the Potomac
- 2000. Friends of the Potomac in partnership with Alexandria Seaport Foundation and National Park Service host the first annual Nation's River Bass Tournament.
- 2001. Friends of the Potomac elects watershed representatives for Board of Directors. Eighteen board members serve on three Councils: Non Government, State/Local Government, and Business/Agriculture.

—Timeline from Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin 1999 Annual Report.



A lone fisherman enjoys a quiet evening spent fly-fishing on the Potomac. Many people across the basin come to the Potomac's waters to explore, relax, and experience its bounty. This is the promise of the Potomac.